

Oregon offers Vegas-style gaming

CASINOS continued
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lottery games and pull tab player terminals.

According to the Washington Gambling Commission, each player terminal in a casino has to be connected to a central computer system that distributes predetermined outcomes.

"Most players are unaware how Washington casino player terminal games operate," says the sign posted at Spirit Mountain Casino. "The games look the same, but in truth they are not. The slot vendors have worked hard to make the Scratch Ticket Lottery/Pull Tab Players Terminals (Washington) look just like their Classic Vegas slot machine (Oregon) counterparts."

Spirit Mountain Casino Marketing Director Shawna Ridgebear says guests that she and Dillon have talked to on the casino floor are surprised when they learn the differences in how the slot machines operate.

"As we have been putting the signage out on the casino floor we are getting the same response back from our guests that are quite honestly shocked when they hear the difference," Ridgebear says. "The most common immediate response is, 'Is that true?' It seems so shocking. We will stop and talk to guests who are seeing this information for the first time and they are shocked."

The difference is important since slot machines traditionally supply casinos with a majority of their revenue.

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Tribal casinos in Oregon offer



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

These informational signs are on display at Spirit Mountain Casino. They point out the differences between Spirit Mountain Casino and gaming in Oregon vs. gaming in Washington state's 28 Tribal casinos.

players Las Vegas-style slot machines and Washington Tribes extend video "scratch" ticket terminals to their guests via compacts with the state.

Oregon is home to nine Tribal casinos and there are 28 Tribal casinos in Washington, including the new Cowlitz venue. Washington Tribes have compacts with the state that allow them to have table games as well as electronic "scratch" ticket games, which use a finite number of tickets with a predetermined number of winning and losing pulls.

By compact, video "scratch" ticket terminals have a high limit bet of \$20. Washington Tribes are not required to release outcome information on their video terminal machines.

The differences get technical, but they do affect the gaming experience for casino customers.

Final outcomes on Las Vegas-style slot machines, which are

offered in Oregon, are the result of a random number generator while outcomes on slot machines offered north of the Columbia River are the result of a pattern from an electronic bingo game.

In essence, Oregon gamers are playing against the house and in Washington they are playing against other players who are also playing that particular game. Each spin of the wheel on a Washington casino video slot machine is a separate bingo drawing along with the other players playing that particular game at that time.

The classes of games offered at Tribal casinos are defined in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988.

Odds for a Las Vegas-style video poker game are determined on a 52-card deck. The odds for a Washington casino video poker game come from patterns on a bingo card.

Player strategy and skill do not exist for Washington casino machines as the outcomes are predetermined by the pattern of the bingo game and nothing a player does influences the result.

Take video poker for example.

Professional gambler Dom LoRiggio owns Golden Touch in Las Vegas and teaches gaming seminars there and in Atlantic City, Memphis and Shreveport, La. He is considered one of the best professional gamblers, ranked eighth best ever by Listverse.

LoRiggio, who is from New York City and has been a professional gambler for more than 40 years, says there really is a difference in the machines and players know it.

LoRiggio says video poker machines are highly regulated and in Nevada they have to produce by law a royal flush at least once every 42,000 spins. Vegas-style machines can hit back-to-back "royals" – albeit very rarely – because they are coming from a random number generator. A player cannot hit back-to-back jackpots on a predetermined outcome from a Washington casino

video poker machine.

"On a tab machine, they (the casino) can have it win or they can have it lose whenever they want to," says LoRiggio in a telephone interview from Las Vegas. "On a tab machine they can make the edge anything they want. They can have a 15 percent edge or an 18 percent edge if they want to."

By edge, LoRiggio is talking about the amount of money a casino keeps on average from a player. He said if the edge is 14 percent, then the house keeps \$14 from every \$100 that goes in the casino. If the edge is 3 percent then the house keeps \$3 for every \$100.

According to gaming expert Jerry Stickman of *Casino City Times*, the edge can be determined for Las Vegas-style slot machines by comparing the odds of the hand and its corresponding payoff. The sum result is subtracted from 100 and you know the house edge.

Stickman says this cannot be done with video terminals because the odds of completing the game are not random because they are determined by a central server.

Steve Bourie, author of the "American Casino Guide," says a random number generator is a computer chip that stops instantly when a player pushes the "spin" button and displays the result of that "spin" on the reel in front of them.

"This means when you see the reel spinning the actual results have already been determined by the RNG," Bourie says. "Reels don't even have to spin in reality to show you what you have won or lost."

Bourie says game manufacturers install the chip and it controls the percentage of how much a particular machine pays out in winnings. The range varies from a low of about 85 percent to a high of about 98 percent. The higher the denomination of the machine, the higher percentage it is set to pay back.

Bourie says penny machines are usually set in the range of 87 percent to 90 percent and that \$25 slot machines will pay back at a 95- to 98-percent rate.

When asked if his option were to drive 40 minutes southwest of his home to play Las Vegas-style machines or 15 minutes north to play the other machines, LoRiggio responded quickly.

"I'm going to go to the (Vegas-style machines)," LoRiggio says. "Why? Because I'm a knowledgeable player. Anybody with some knowledge is going to want to play where the casino has the lowest edge against the player. I'm going to drive more than 40 miles. I'll drive an hour and a half to a game that has better edge for me." ■

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